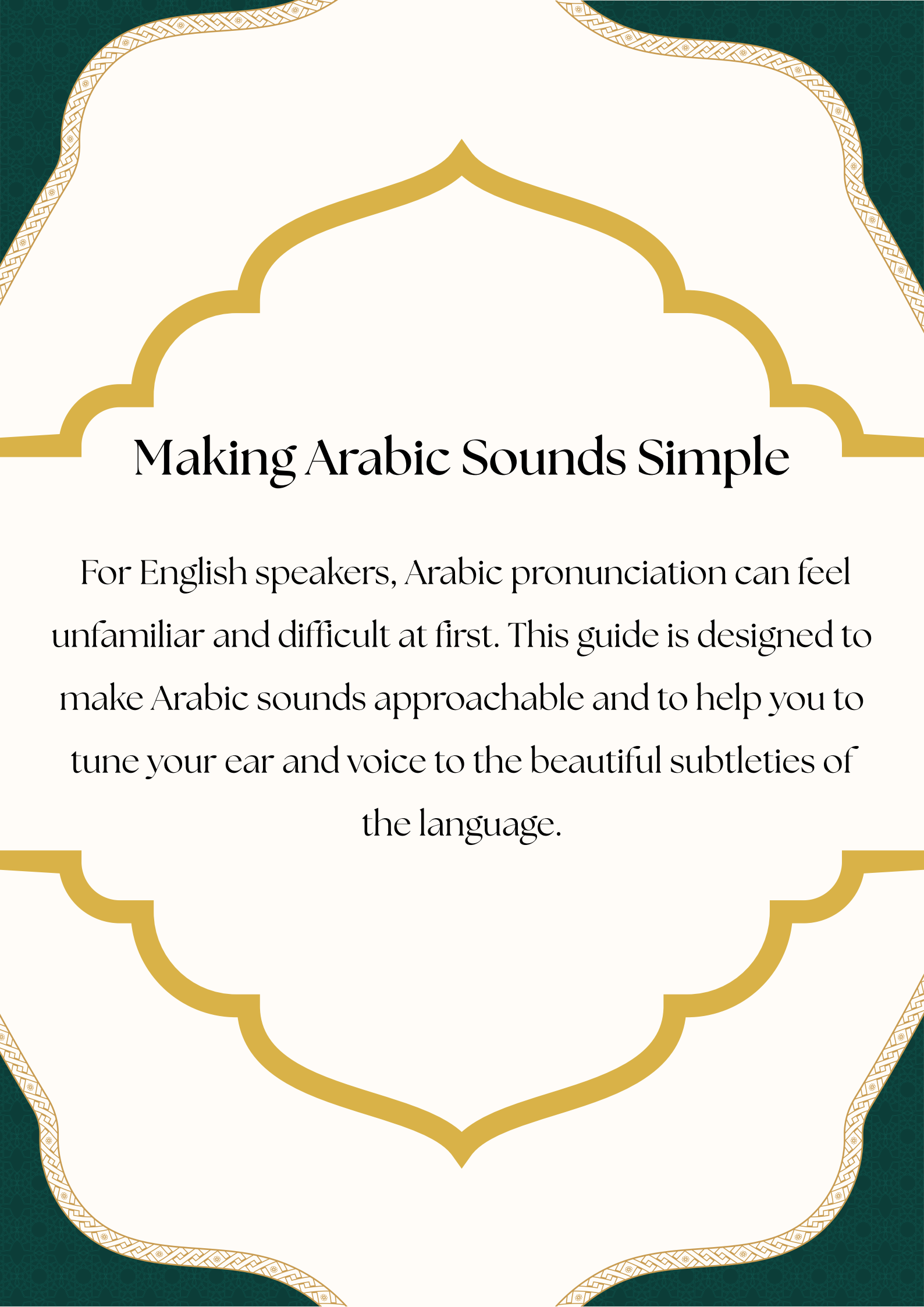


The background features a central gold arch shape. The corners are decorated with a dark green background and a gold geometric pattern. The main area is white.

Making Arabic Sounds Simple

For English speakers, Arabic pronunciation can feel unfamiliar and difficult at first. This guide is designed to make Arabic sounds approachable and to help you to tune your ear and voice to the beautiful subtleties of the language.

The Familiar Sounds

Many Arabic sounds overlap with English.

ب (b) = “b” as in bat

ت (t) = “t” as in top

ف (f) = “f” as in fun

م (m) = “m” as in man

ن (n) = “n” as in net

ل (l) = “l” as in love

و (w) = “w” as in water

ي (y) = “y” as in yes

These need no special effort beyond clarity.





The Nearly-Familiar Sounds

These exist in English, but placement/tone differs.

ﺩ (d)

English d, but lighter and dental (tongue on teeth, not behind).

ﺭ (r)

a tap or roll, like Spanish r. Not the English “r.”

ﺯ (z)

like z in zoo.

ﺱ (s)

like s in sun, but purer (no buzzing).

ﻩ (h)

like h in hat, but sometimes stronger and breathier.





The New but Learnable Sounds

Arabic has several letters that don't exist in English:

ح (h)

A breathy “h” deep in the throat, like a whispery sigh.

خ (kh)

A throaty sound, like clearing your throat gently,
found in German Bach.

ع (‘)

A voiced throat sound, like a squeeze of the vocal
cords mid-word. Think of a deep, voiced grunt, but
softer.

غ (gh)

Like the French ‘r’ in rue.

ق (q)

A hard “k” deep in the throat.



The “Emphatic” Letters

These are the tricky part. They sound similar to English letters, but are heavier, pulling the back of the tongue down.

ص (ṣ) - heavy ‘s’

ض (ḍ) - heavy ‘d’

ط (ṭ) - heavy ‘t’

ظ (ẓ) - heavy z/th (like that but deeper)

For English learners, imagine saying the sound while pressing the back of your tongue down toward your throat.

Vowels and Length

Arabic has three short vowels, shown with ḥarakāt (marks above or below the letter):

a (َ) as in cat

i (ِ) as in bit

u (ُ) as in put

Each of these can also be long, written with an extra letter:

aa (ا) as in father

ii (ي) as in beet

uu (و) as in boot

The difference in length is essential. For example:

qalam (قَلَم) = pen

qālam (قَالَ) = he spoke



Word Stress

In most Arabic words, stress falls toward the end of the word, often on the last or second-to-last syllable.

For example: *madrása* (school), *mufiid* (useful).

Consonant Doubling (Shadda)

Arabic can “double” a consonant using the shadda (ّ) mark.

When you see this, hold the consonant sound slightly longer than normal.

Example: *hubb* (حُبّ = love)

Another example: *madrasah* (مَدْرَسَة = school) vs. *mudarris* (مُدَرِّس = teacher). The doubled “r” in *mudarris* is essential.

Misplacing stress or skipping a doubled consonant can make your Arabic harder to understand or even change the word completely.